

DEAD JANGLE

Written by

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INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR BASEMENT - DAY

Very obviously the 60s.

LASZLO (17), a tall, handsome young black man with thick coke-bottle glasses, dressed in freshly-pressed clothing, nervously washes his hands at a large metal sink. The room is clinically white, except for the brown linoleum tiles.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
It was my first job.

An open coffin fills the centre of the room, cherrywood with gold handles and trim. The lining inside is a shiny ivory silk.

Unseen behind it is the body of a tall man. On his large feet are a pair of shiny red cowboy boots with gold spurs. They are well-worn, but equally well taken care of. The boots stick out slightly, the only thing we can see of him behind the coffin.

The funeral parlour DIRECTOR (45) enters in a rush, a short man, with rectangular glasses, a receding hairline, and perfectly-fitted clothes. He removes his wool coat.

DIRECTOR  
I tell you, I'll be late for my own  
funeral one day.

The Director removes his tie and hangs it and his coat behind the door he just entered. He walks past Laszlo to get to the sink and rinses his face.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
(joking)  
Mighty warm out. Maybe we just hold  
the service in here!

Laszlo shivers. His voice is warm and youthful, less confident than his narrating voice.

LASZLO  
I don't think the family'd  
appreciate it, sir. Cold as a grave  
in here.

The Director LAUGHS, draws a towel from a cupboard and pats his face and neck dry.

DIRECTOR  
Give 'im a spin, boy, and we'll get  
'im upstairs.

Laszlo steps over to the body and hesitates.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
He won't bite, you know.

LASZLO  
I know, sir, it's just...the boots?  
How's we supposed to lay 'em in?  
Flat?

The Director gets a curious look on his face and joins Laszlo at the man's feet. (All we ever see is the boots, never the body behind the coffin.) He puts his hands on his hips.

DIRECTOR  
No, no, wouldn't do to have 'em  
pointing out like a prima  
ballerina, now would it?

Laszlo CHUCKLES. The director smiles.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Pull open that drawer for me?

Laszlo opens the drawer the Director points at on the opposite side of the room and removes a large golden handle.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Perfect. Goes with the others.  
Bring it here with some screws.  
Hurry, now. Not a lot of time.

Laszlo hands everything over and watches as the director pulls a screwdriver from another drawer and screws the golden handle into one end of the inside of the coffin. He finishes and Laszlo hands him a hankie to wipe his damp forehead.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Thank you. *There* now, now he can  
relax and put his feet up.

Laszlo smiles.

LASZLO  
My momma says death must be like a  
paid vacation.

DIRECTOR  
She's right, too. All this boy's  
hard walkin' is done.

Scores of shiny shoes pass the narrow window at the top of the basement wall.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Ah, the mourners have arrived. Now, you mind the business-end o' them boots, I'll take the shoulders, and we'll get this show on the road.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - AFTERNOON

The sun shines hot on the mourners, priest, Director and Laszlo, who wrings out his handkerchief to dab at his neck, then respectfully returns his hands to cross in front of his thighs.

The priest closes his small prayer book and nods at the four pallbearers, who take their position at the four corners of the coffin, pick up their ropes and begin lowering the coffin into the grave.

The coffin slowly makes its way down into the earth, the sun reflecting off the inscribed golden placard on one end of its lid. The coffin pauses on its way down. Laszlo looks up. One of the smaller pallbearers can't keep his grip on the rope - it's too sweaty - and the rope slips, making the placard-end of the coffin hit dirt first.

The spurs JANGLE loudly.

Laszlo's eyes widen in panic.

LASZLO (V.O.)

We put him in the wrong way 'round.

Everyone glowers at the guilty pallbearer, but Laszlo looks at the Director, who doesn't seem to have noticed.

The remaining three pallbearers calmly finish lowering the coffin, allowing everyone else to toss in their flowers, dirt or blow final kisses.

Laszlo and the Director stand off to the side as the mourners pass.

LASZLO

(quietly)

Uh, sir?

DIRECTOR

Yes, son?

LASZLO

Sir, I think we-

FEMALE MOURNER

Oh, thank you!

A FEMALE MOURNER (58), a prim woman in a black veil and pale lipstick interrupts him. She closes her black fan and pulls the Director in for a hug, then returns to fanning herself as they separate.

FEMALE MOURNER (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for what you've done, sir. He looked marvelous. And the service and parlour looked just wonderful. You'll come for the reception, won't you? You must be hungry.

DIRECTOR

Oh, I-

She takes his arm and pats it.

FEMALE MOURNER

It'll get you out of this heat.

The Director smiles warmly at the woman, then turns to Laszlo.

DIRECTOR

Can you finish up here on your own, son? This weather's not good for my health.

LASZLO

Yes, sir, but I-

The woman has already lead the director away.

Laszlo turns, looks at the grave, SIGHS-

LASZLO (V.O.)

Well...he was already dead. What did it matter?

-picks up a shovel and starts burying.

INT. LASZLO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Laszlo's at the tail-end of his supper. His MOMMA (38), a thick woman in a floral summer dress and immaculate hair, clears the small table around him.

MOMMA

So, how was your first day?

Laszlo pauses with his forkful of food halfway to his mouth and stares up at his mother.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I shoulda just kept my mouth shut.

EXT. LASZLO'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - EVENING

Laszlo stands outside clutching his fork as his coat, shoes and a garden shovel are chucked at him through the open door.

MOMMA  
Don't you be comin' back here 'til  
you fix what you did! I don't want  
no bad juju followin' you into *my*  
house!

The door SLAMS.

The sky turns navy blue and it begins to rain. Laszlo SIGHS, bends, picks up the coat and shovel.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
So I walked on back.

EXT. GRASSY HILL - EVENING

Laszlo races the rain to the top of a hill overlooking the graveyard. He stops to catch his breath. NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL MUSIC plays in the distance, growing closer...

He squints, removes his glasses to wipe them with his soaked handkerchief, replaces them and pushes them up his nose. No better.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

Down the hill, marching in the rain is a funeral procession and marching band, all heading towards the gates of the graveyard, viewable just a little further down the road.

EXT. GRASSY HILL - EVENING

LASZLO  
(defeated)  
Oh, no...

He tucks his shovel as best as he can under his coat and slips and slides down the hill to join the back of the procession.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

Last in line, Laszlo tips his hat to the few faces that turn to regard him. He tries to look familiar yet reverent.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
They seemed nice enough.

A handful of people smile at him, then return their attention to the front and continue to march. They are oddly dry...

LASZLO (V.O.)  
Didn't ask no questions. I figured  
I could stay for their service,  
stick around afterwards, then fix  
my mistake after they all left.

EXT. GRAVEYARD GATE - NIGHT

The rain slowly stops as they reach the black wrought-iron gate and a cold white fog settles in. Laszlo waits patiently as someone at the front of the procession RATTLES the gates.

Nothing happens. The procession parts down the middle, and every eye turns to look at Laszlo.

The YOUNG MAN (27) closest to Laszlo taps his arm.

YOUNG MAN  
You got the key, brother?

LASZLO  
Hm?

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I didn't think anything of it at  
the time...

LASZLO  
Oh!

Laszlo reaches into his pocket and pulls out the keyring with a thick black key. He hands it over to the young man. The young man nods gratefully, marches up to the gate, unlocks it, and gestures for everyone to come in.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
...but why wouldn't they have a key  
for a funeral that *they* arranged?

Laszlo passes through the gate and closes it. He takes the hand of an OLD LADY to help her over a puddle and when she turns to thank him, it's an OLD LADY SKELETON smiling at him, dressed in her Sunday best.

Laszlo's eyes go huge and he fumbles backwards for the gate.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I wasn't getting out. This gate  
locked from both sides, and I had  
just given away the only key.

His hands fumble at the handle and he pushes and pulls on the bars, but nothing happens. He turns around to look at the procession, now a host of glowing skeletons, some holding instruments, all staring at him in concern.

The old lady skeleton puts her hand on Laszlo's arm and smiles at him.

OLD LADY SKELETON  
Come along, now.

She pulls him with her and they rejoin her group. Laszlo watches as in horror they all make their way to the grave of freshly-turned earth he intended to dig up.

A BIG SKELETON, thicker in the chest than the others, pats Laszlo's arm, pulls open his coat and takes the shovel hidden there. Laszlo doesn't stop him. The big skeleton takes the shovel and begins digging up the corpse from earlier.

The remaining skeletons SING A SONG about delaying a trip home.

The big skeleton with the shovel makes short work of the exhumation and KNOCKS twice on the coffin lid.

Something pushes it open from within, and a tall COWBOY (39) sits up and looks around him in confusion. His skeleton is just visible beneath his now thin white skin.

The big skeleton with the shovel and the young man skeleton help the cowboy up.

YOUNG MAN SKELETON  
You gotta start walkin' with us  
brother.

The cowboy narrows his eyes, not understanding.



YOUNG MAN SKELETON (CONT'D)  
Ya been buried the wrong way  
'round. Now ya gotta walk the earth  
seven times 'fore you can go home.

Laszlo SLAPS a hand to his mouth, a look of fear on his face. This catches the cowboy's attention. He stares at Laszlo, very obviously the only living one in the graveyard, the only one without a glowing white haze around him.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I thought for sure, this cowboy  
would turn on me.

A CHILD SKELETON in a cloth cap, holds up a small drum to the cowboy. The cowboy shakes his head, takes the shovel from the big skeleton and takes a step towards Laszlo. His spurs JANGLE softly.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I thought he'd kill me for what I  
done.

The rest of the skeletons turn and face Laszlo, too. They shuffle forward.

LASZLO (V.O.)  
I thought he'd try and make me walk  
in his place.

Laszlo covers his face as the cowboy and skeletons approach him. He shivers, MUMBLES prayers for forgiveness.

The skeletons pass him and begin to SING and play their instruments again. The young man skeleton unlocks the gates for them, hangs the key on the handle and follows the others.

Laszlo uncovers his head and looks up. He YELPS and falls down in the mud when he sees the cowboy standing over him with the shovel.

LASZLO  
I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I-!

The cowboy leans forward and holds out Laszlo's shovel. Laszlo stares at it for a moment, then takes it with one shaking hand. When he grasps it, the cowboy walks past him to join the other skeletons, his spurs JANGLING in time with the sad music.

Laszlo watches them go, clutching the shovel and shivering in the fog.

END